

FOOL'S ERRAND

ALEXANDER LAING



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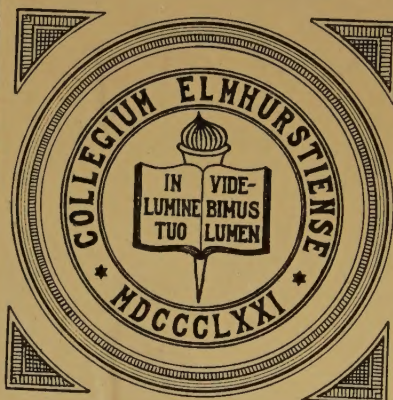
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ALEXANDER LAING
FOOL'S ERRAND



GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK
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First Edition

*It is in truth iniquity on high
To cheat our sentenced souls of aught they crave,
And mar the merriment as you and I
Fare on our long fool's errand to the grave.*

—A. E. HOUSMAN

DEDICATION

For 'Ελένη

Etheric gales from spotted suns
Have gone like lightning through my brain
To whirl away the dregs of pain
And trade new thoughts for dusty ones.

The lad you knew in lilac time
Is here; but also you will find
The pattern of a stranger's mind:
Another youth, a newer rhyme.

Do not believe that I am keeping
Old promises, in any part;
But lay them underneath your heart
And sleep, and dream that I am sleeping.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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CASEMENT

EQUINOCTIAL DAWN

Cassiopeia, glittering and fickle,
Slumbers. Her sun-chair withers on the sight;
And daylight, arching like a silver sickle,
Mows at the amber margin of the night.

Blood-red and golden now, the battle wave
Of light and darkness fighting heaves its crest
Over the house of life, over the grave,
On its eternal journey to the West.

The Earth is girdled by a crimson band
Of dawn and sunset, holding night from day.
The rim of Winter crosses where we stand
Watching the edge of Summer ebb away.

One mighty circle where the light-waves veer
On the refracting air along the shore
Of darkness, links together, twice a year,
North Pole, New York, South Pole, and Singapore.

THE LAST ROMANTIC

Time went away, and left him lingering,
The last romantic in a little town.
He drowzes in the twilight, fingering
A scrap of muslin from an antique gown.

Old odors find his nostrils when he drowzes:
Cedar, Amontillado, lavender;
And white façades of stately Georgian houses
Grow in the air to make a frame for her.

She has been dead for thirty years or more;
And even could she come, eyes glistening,
He would not hear her fingers strike the door:
He has gone deaf from too much listening.

He has gone deaf, and time has gone away.
The oleander flowers soon will pass.
His julep stands forgotten on a tray,
And "Pickwick" sprawls forlornly on the grass.

Over the garden drifts a scent of musk,
And in the fringes of the fading light
Round hills, like lonely opals in the dusk,
Deepen to purple, and are one with night.

PREScription FOR AN EGOTIST

Lay a level beam of light
Out of molten Fomalhaut
Near the blurring edge of night,
When the dark begins to grow.

Bring the beam to tangency
On the seashore where you stand.
Let the point of contact be
Where the water wets the sand.

Lie along the level beam.
Let your shoulder form a node.
Through the Earth direct your dream,
Through, and past the antipode.

Strike beyond the farthest sun.
Find the nadir where it lies
In a void of unbegun
Hollowings for farther skies.

Lie along the vibrant ray,
Doubting all you ever knew;
Caging pain in lips gone gray,
Let the world roll over you.

F A M E

Bind the laurel on your brow
Bitterly, and rest you now.
Youth is past and love is dead.
Poet, rest your weary head.

They have laurelled you to-day,
Crown of green on head of gray.
They have come to call you great,
Poet, half a life too late.

NORWICH MILL POND: WINTER AFTERNOON

Ice demons crack a hundred hidden whips
As daylight wanes and purple shadows grow,
Seeking the East with slender fingertips.
Then silence falls; and lightly over snow
There steals a murmur from forgotten lips,
The ghost of laughter perished long ago.

SEVEN MEN

For Art, Bill, Bob, Brice, Dick, Dunc, and Gail

These are the gay blasphemers,
The cynical, the droll,
The drinkers and the dreamers
Who under-rate the soul.

They vend their slender chances
On paradise, to tread
The Devil's mocking dances
Between the burning dead.

They cater to the belly—
All epicures are odd—
And write the name of Shelley
Above the name of God.

Yet they are gallant livers,
Both whimsical and wise,
World fighters, world forgivers,
With courage in their eyes.

Their souls are sold, all seven;
And mine is lost as well
Through doubts about a heaven
That sends such men to Hell.

MOUNTAIN MOMENT

Out across the morning
The air lies blue and silver
Over curving valleys,
Cupping seas of mist.
Day comes bearing banners
Over Mount Ascutney.
All the trees are music reeds
To whispers of the wind.

Wet leaves of the birches
Wink and shimmer, framing
Half a million Danaë's
In a rain of gold:
Half a million birch trunks
Swaying maiden-slender
Down a curving mountainside
That surges like a wave.

Look! For it is fleeting.
Such a moment settles
For a moment only
And is quick to die.
Eyes, be bright for beauty
Young as this, remember
Shimmering of golden rain:
Birches in the dawn!

SWIMMER

His chin cut water
Dry as wind,
As he bathed the body
That had sinned:

The body that once
Had stooped to sup
On flesh, and drink
From a sanguine cup.

He bathed his limbs;
But always when
He paused the stain
Returned again.

White anger whirled
In his avid mind
At the sins he never
Could leave behind.

He strove to swim
In a frenzied fear,
But made no sound
For the ear to hear.

He strove to swim;
But his shoulders bare
Cut into water
As thin as air.

He paused in terror
And raised his head,
Hearing the moan
Of a million dead:

The moan that rises
When hope is gone.
And he knew the river
Was Acheron.

LINDBERGH: A BALLAD

The lamp of valor flickered low;
The Viking banners all were furled
And put away where shadows go
When nightfall wanders in the world.

With wary eyes and voices hushed
We rendered our unlovely parts.
A god of yellow metal crushed
The hero-hunger in our hearts.

We wrote a tale of wasted days,
Successes that were not success.
What we had won in little ways
We spent for little, or for less. . . .

And then the silver monoplane,
Humming an iron monotone,
Leaped; and a glory filled the brain:
"*Lindbergh, the eagle, flies alone.*"

A hush of wonder stilled the air.
Cold men forgot their scorn, and prayed
Some half-remembered wisp of prayer.
We feared for him, the unafraid.

No news, until, on every hand
The word rang like a sudden bell:
Between the crags of Newfoundland
He waved a hemisphere farewell.

Fog laid its icy film of death
Along the silver, cambered wings.
The shifting ocean snarled beneath
In promise of the end of things.

The ocean lost, as onward hurled
The Spirit, lonely and elate.
Dawn swept across the bending world
To meet them off the Irish gate.

Ireland, the Continent, and night
Once more; and then a distant spark
Glimmered and grew. The signal light
That marks Le Bourget split the dark.

"I am Charles Lindbergh." Thus he taught
Humility and fearlessness,
And spoke a name that could be bought
For science, but for nothing less.

A little while he talked with kings;
He walked with crowds a little while
Before he buckled on his wings,
Lifting the world's heart with a smile.

Will we remember, as we settle
Back to our littleness again:
We, who are strangers to his mettle
That grows too seldom among men?

Whatever memory may do,
One proud truth has been written plain
For men in every age to view:
That valor never is in vain.

Though we forget, before we die,
The steady courage of his face,
His leap across the curving sky
Has changed the story of the race.

In valor's trophied corridors
Immutable the glory stands
With banners of forgotten wars
That flamed through unremembered lands.

THE YEAR THAT WENT ASTRAY

A SONG FOR ALTER EGO

Thin forgotten music flutters,
Tangled in a skein of breeze.
Something under shadow utters
Fragments of old melodies.

Mist is falling, rising, falling,
Hiding features of the dead;
And a voice is crying, calling,
Trying to un-say the said.

There's a past for all to smother.
Do not try to understand.
Come away, unhappy brother,
Come away from shadowland.

HE REMEMBERS HIS FIRST SONG

It comes from over sea
With a long wave sound,
Breaking bewilderingly
On the hard ground:

A song of dancing blades
And love before the testing
In quite forgotten glades
With a low sun westing.

Who was the boy to lure
Brave music to this whim?
I knew him, I am sure.
I had forgotten him.

What has been its guide
Through wan moon glow?
The music maker died
So long ago.

DREAM IN APRIL

I think her eyes, observing me,
Were starlight on a quiet sea.

Inaudibly she spoke my name,
Like wind across a candle flame;

And then her words came stealing down
Like bells in some forgotten town,

The echo of a carillon
Lingering when the notes are gone.

She said, "*In all your voyages
You shall not find such hands as these,*

*These hands which might have soothed your pain
Better than petals wet with rain.*

*They are not beautiful; and yet
These hands you never shall forget."*

She said, "*No woman that you find
Will be as I have been: unkind;*

*Yet, do not hope for one more fair.
You shall find no-one lovelier;*

*For I, that am less fair than wise,
Have cast a magic on your eyes.*

*Though others may not think me fair,
You shall find no-one lovelier.*

*But never ask why this is so;
I do not know; I cannot know."*

*The vision thinned to silver smoke
And put on darkness like a cloak.*

SONG OF THE BELOVED

What does she now, whose ways are past my knowing?
What cool, dark lover's arm compels her now?
Does her hair mix with winds, when winds are blowing,
As once it did? Tell me, does she allow
Waves and the foam of waves upon the water
To frame her moving beauty, like a gull?
She, who was nearest to the sea's own daughter,
So coldly beautiful,
Turned with a homing gesture to the sea
Always, and gull wings were a part of her.
The sea beat strongly in the heart of her;
And green waves held her body jealously.

Can she have changed, my lost, my lovely one?
I am too far to know, too proud to learn,
Sitting alone when afternoon is done,
Watching low clouds along the skyline burn
And crumple into darkness. Night is here,
Full of the lonely wind, my roving brother.
I only know that she was very dear;
For me there is no other.
Her name was like the trembling of a bell!
Wind from the midnight places, blow to her;
Whisper that one who may not go to her
Wishes her well.

IN HARBOR

(*St. John's, Newfoundland. 1925*)

One cannot call it sorrow any more;
It is so vague and far-away a feeling.
Faintly the memory of her goes stealing
Out like a ship that seeks another shore.

Once it was like the angry sweep of knives
To see the joy of love on others' faces.
Now it is good to hear the sailors' wives
Croon, as the homing vessels find their places.

There is so much that we need not remember—
There is so little we may not forget—
How can I know the day may not come yet
That brings to ash a slowly dying ember?

So many lovers of the spar and mast,
In some far harbor blue with Arctic air,
Have seen a graceful ship go sailing past
That might as well have stopped and anchored there.

OLD ROADS

Here where the rotting corduroy
Wanders along the swampy places
Wanders as well a lonely boy
Looking his last on phantom faces.

Berries are bright along the swale;
Bright on the hills the Autumn burns.
Silence is heavy on the trail
That leads to nowhere and returns.

The trail returns; and the boy, returning,
Softly smiles as over the hill
Nightfall carries the ancient, yearning,
Rapid cry of the whippoorwill.

He comes to the lighted homes of men
With quiet in his heart at last,
Never, never to walk again
The ruined roadways of the past.

MIRROR

TWENTY-SECOND SPRING

When I have torn more leaves from calendars
Than future calendars will have me tear,
At last admitting that the quiet stars
Lie years beyond my reaching in the air,
Yet nearer than they ever were in youth,
I shall be quiet too, and I shall find
My world-embracing journey after truth
Turns inward on the roadways of the mind.

Still the way wanders down the breast of Earth;
But there must be an end to earthly travel
When far horizons seem of little worth
And feet are wearied by the bruising gravel;
When dangers fail to make the nostrils quiver
And start the knees a-shivering instead;
And tavern nights wreak havoc with the liver
And set an anvil clanging in the head.

When in the afternoon of middle age
Over the world the evergreens are graying,
I shall put on the cassock of a sage
And possibly experiment with praying.
Then I shall substitute the cabin fire
For jack-o'-lantern burning on the mast
And, poking at the ashes of desire,
Read in the book of reverie at last.

These things shall I remember, growing old:
May, like a mantle over Hanover,
Struck by the sunlight into green and gold;
And, with the Autumn turning wanderer,
October flinging scarlet on the hills
When through the college one sees everywhere
Brown jugs of cider on the windowsills
And footballs arching through October air.

I shall recall a brook that flowed between
Two skies and four bright rows of sycamores,
Meandering to swamps where willows lean
In meditation by the crumbling shores;
And the salt-heavy ocean wind at dawn,
Combing the wild hair of the ocean spray,
Crying that strength and beauty may be one,
Veering from sunrise in the van of day.

Always at sound of hooves I shall remember
A lonely horseman breaking through the dark
High over Norwich in the chill November,
Seeking the solitude of skies to mark
How the sun-sandals of Orion flare
Over the skyline with his hounds in cry;
Then bridling West again to notice where
Brilliant Arcturus pediments the Y.

When each unborn and distant April speaks
In showery whispers on the windowpane
There will come after-thoughts of cloudy peaks
Seen through the ragged ribbons of the rain

By two wet vagabonds who found a way
Up the late lingering snow on Webster Slide
Into a golden afternoon that lay
Breathless with wonder on the mountainside.

When lack of lands to learn and seas to sail
Someday has brought me to the ingle chair,
Wearied of seeking some forgotten grail
Filled with the fragrance of a woman's hair,
My mind will turn to twenty-one again
And carry to the narrow resting place—
O beautiful beyond the dreams of men—
The unforgotten beauty of one face.

Unseen, and so perennially fair,
Free of the turning cycle of the cold,
She walks with April always in her hair;
She has the gift of never being old.
So, when the memory of her is past,
Stoop over me to see the light go gray
In eyes where night lies quietly at last
Beyond all dreams of day.

THE TAKEN CITADEL

All the way home the purple-shouldered Bull
Stared with his one red eye, Aldebaran;
Immensity accentuates the pull
Of loneliness against the heart of man.

Farther than Taurus, farther than the swirl
Of nebulae behind Orion's knife,
Something said lightly had conspired to hurl
The surety that had dominated life.

Mountains and trees and houses drew away.
The world withdrew; and space, in one great sea,
Swept from behind eternity and lay
In icy depths of quiet over me.

More lonely than a frozen asteroid
Bending forever round a heedless sun,
The heart became a changeling of the void.
One evening saw the work of years undone.

Concentric shells of reticence were riven.
The armor hammered out of scorn and mirth
To guard an organ once too freely given
Was broken, and fell wearily to Earth.

Tomorrow I may gather up the scattered
Shards, and reforge a cell for singleness.
She need not know that it was ever shattered.
All will be as it was . . . unless . . . unless . . . !

THOUGHTS LOCKING ANTLERS

There are winds like hairy giants
West of Chile,
Where the wild Pacific rages at its name.

*See the delphinium border
Under the climbing bean blossoms:
Candles in the dusk.*

I have been in winds,
West of Chile,
That were like the dragging beards of giants
Flying low
Over the water.

*There is all of early Autumn
In the tall delphiniums,
And all of dancing June
In the climbing bean blossoms.
Why are they together
Like candles
And candle flame,
Now?*

I have been caught in the dragnet
Of giant beards
Seining low over the leaping deck
Leagues west of Chile
On a sea gone mad.

*Blue candles, blue candles,
Dim in the dusk—*

INTROSPECTION

Not centaur-wise, not linked by muscle bands
That join divine flesh to the less divine,
But quite apart the god within me stands
Hearing the beast within me growl or whine
To indicate frank animal emotion:
The wish to kill, the candid fear of death,
Dog weariness, or any other notion,
With present need its only shibboleth.

The beast-hands twitch and fidget, while a lust
For pressing woman-breast or woman-thigh
Stirs the beginning of the time of must.
The god, sad-eyed, stands impotently by.
He sees his cage mate pander to its need
Until, befuddled by its merriment,
With body eased by freeing of the seed,
It sleeps awhile in animal content.

Gods have a bitter time when they are young.
Only the old gods are inured to pain
Through surfeit of the arrows time has flung
All without reason through the wounded brain.
Mirth comes with age. There is no mirth in youth,
Only blind laughter when a pain has ceased.
The young god takes not easily to truth,
And wonders at the reason for the beast.

The spurning god-foot, thudding on its side,
Sometimes awakes the beast from lethargy

To thoughts of carnal pleasures half denied.
Though each is victor, intermittently
In this, the ancient battle sending blows
Throbbing along the fibres of my frame,
The god stays obdurate; and yet, he knows
The beast was there before he ever came.

DIRGE FOR A SINGER

Carry her dust away;
She has forsaken us.
Pray that another day
Never shall waken us.

Woke we to hear, always,
Music go by with her.
What were the need of days
Now song must die with her?

Fingers that held her sweet
Hands, now prepare the veil.
Weave in her winding sheet
Wings of the nightingale.

TRIOLET

The night is full of the crying
Of dreams that will not die,
Deathless and time defying;
The night is full of the crying
Of restless phantoms, flying
Mysteriously by.
The night is full of the crying
Of dreams that will not die.

EAGLET

For My Mother

Far from the nest, wingèd mother,
Wheeling in flight,
Far to the West, wingèd mother.
Far from your sight,
I have gone questing
Valueless things,
Scornfully testing
Immature wings.

Riding the gale, proud mother,
I too am proud.
Swiftly I sail, proud mother,
Oceans of cloud.
Valleys go under.
Granite blows past
Shaken with thunder
Swept on the blast.

There must be born, brave mother,
Often in vain,
Children of scorn, brave mother,
Children of pain,
Who will partake of
Sorrow and wrong
All for the sake of
Snatches of song.

Out of it all, tired mother,
Flying too fast—
Surely to fall, tired mother,
Broken at last,
May come a regal
Magical thing:
The screaming eagle
May learn to sing.

So I am blown, eagle mother,
Seeking strange food.
Far have I flown, eagle mother,
Worst of the brood.
Ingrate you proved me
Under your breast.
Why have you loved me
Always, the best?

THE COMING OF THE SUN

Hushed as a squadron of defeated ghosts,
The pitiful thin wraiths of river mist
Waver and wander up the twilit coasts.
Imponderable arrows in her fist,
Aurora leaps to spear the land with gold.
Doubts that have cloaked the reason fall away
The mind has come triumphant from its mold
Breaking the standardizing walls of clay.
It is a free thing, scorning approbation,
Terror, or warning, free in every sense
To choose its own particular damnation
Without consulting musty testaments;
Even so free that it may choose to be
Bound in a service beyond liberty.

The mind lay in the shadow of a light,
Shackled in platitudes that men live by,
When terror flung a saddle on the night
And galloped wild across a staring sky,
Terror of littleness that clipped the chain
With iron hooves. The mind arose to fare
Through clouds of doubt to where the moon was plain,
A burnished wafer hung in star-split air.
Reflected inklings of the light of truth
Raced from the moon to guide a mind that passed
Fiercely upon the funeral of youth
Until a guardian mountain head, at last,
Bowed to discover to the questing one
The sudden silver coming of the sun.

Wavelike the morning washed across the world,
Topped by a creaming golden foam of cloud.
Night, a whipped army with black banners furled,
Sought the Pacific; and the mind was proud,
Erect in individuality,
With its own idiom, its own restraint,
It won the cynic's privilege to see
The sinner masquerading in the saint.

II

The pageant of the tragedy of man
Wound like a worm before the mental eye,
Each metamere a unit of the plan.
Bestial at first, then beautiful, went by
The faces; but each body bore within,
Genetic, the necessity for sin.

Ragged outriders hurried with the worm:
The futile, bitter glory of old wars;
Pestilence, like the plasm of a germ,
Oozing along the fever-yellow shores;
Famine, with sallow parchment on the skull;
Death, with his bare phalanges clattering,
Sightlessly swinging out the knife to cull
Chance mortals to the shadow of the wing.
The weary gods of Epicurus wept
Over the passage of their Frankenstein,
Chattering, "*We are aged and inept;
Leave us to win forgetfulness in wine.*"
Crying, "*We grant to any that awakes
The privilege to make his own mistakes.*"

Concepts that haunt the borderland of thought
Grew real and enormous on the air,
Myths that the childhood of the race had caught
Out of a dark alembic of despair.
Starkly, within the crystal of the day,
They seemed to take the brittleness of matter;
But wisdom whispered to the mind that they
Were shibboleths which only words may shatter.

Impersonal at first, they soon became
Inchoate beings to be feared and fed.
The mind saw gods of terror, quick to blame,
Bloom in the dome of heaven overhead;
And, as the wounded worm went crawling by,
It watched the changing ikon in the sky.

Deep in the womb of Asian intellect
The newer gods gestated, one by one;
But each was born to find his glory wrecked
Before his brief dominion had begun.
The evolution of the brain of man,
The swelling cerebrum, in periods
Of new enlargement, always overran
The static images of man-made gods.
Lashed to the economics of an age,
Each idol crumbled when the age was past.
Vishnu was recreated by the sage
As Krishna, Buddha, Kalki, when at last
Out of his festered anguish man enticed
The flowering, tragic beauty of the Christ.

He said, "*Thou shalt not kill!*" and man appeared
And spiked him on the tree at Golgotha.
He said, "*Thou shalt not kill!*" but Urban feared
The Moslem, and his miter was a star
Guiding all Europe to his godly will,
Its jewels glinting on a million blades
Carving for him who said, "*Thou shalt not kill!*"
The curdling horror of the long crusades.

Bravest and gentlest of the deities
That aimless man has worshipped and assailed,
Worker in wood and walker on the seas,
Jesus of Nazareth had also failed.
Then, as the mind was heavy with his name,
The great worm vanished in a wind of flame.

III

White flowers from the gardens of the sea
Bloomed on the beach in coruscating foam.
A level wind came, riotous and free,
Out of the Indies; and the smell of loam
Vied in the nostrils with a sting of spray,
A sticky tang of underbrush in bud.
Rumbling the rhythm of a saner day,
The drums of freedom beat along the blood.

Breathing the beauty of a world reborn,
The mind said, "*Man has had enough of gods.*
All frail and futile images have gone
Back to their clay again, and left the odds
Against sure knowledge still too strong to batter
Till death and I may argue out the matter.

Wonder of nature calls to me and calls.
Seeds I could worship, stirring in the sod,
The power of the waves and waterfalls;
But is there any need to call it god?
What is there left when pantheism reigns
But the last thinning of a long mischance?
Is it not better when a mortal deigns
To wear the courage of his ignorance?
Not out of gold alone are idols made:
Idols invisible are asked to bless
Man, who has carved them with a mental blade,
Tragic excuses for his littleness,
Shaping the author of ancestral pain
Out of a sly reversal in the brain."

IV

The foaming torrents loosen. Vivid air
Moves to the great orgasm of the Spring.
The brilliant rain, like swirling comet hair,
Harries the gullies where the ledges fling
Thunder aloft to meet the diving thunder.
The mind is quick to each impinging sense,
An instrument attuned to ancient wonder,
Deep in communion with the elements.

Perhaps a spirit that has come to calm
Through courage, and the beauty of the world,
Can aid its fellows, tangled in the charm
Of fear, which lingers from the god that hurled
The ripping thunderbolts of Thessaly
Even in him who walked Gethsemane.

The shackles have been riven from the wrists;
The blindness has been driven from the eyes;
And all the sorry heritage of mists
That cloud the reason quiver now, and rise.
The mind accepts a single way to serve
Its fellows; and the way at last is plain:
To crystallize the contour and the curve
Of sudden music stirring in the brain.

Day wanes, and sweetness settles on the land;
And only echoes of an ancient strife
Sound in a mind which comes to understand
That beauty and courage are enough in life.
The clouds are billowing in rosy foam;
And peace, the wanderer, is coming home.

THE HALF-REMEMBERED

A face that Cimabue set
On fresco plaster in the Spring
Of Thirteen Hundred glimmers yet,
A lovely thing.

The seeping moisture and the mold
Have caused once perfect strokes to blur.
To-day the painting is less bold
And lovelier.

Five years ago an artist drew
As perfect features in my mind,
A picture which he thought was you,
Clearly outlined.

And still the portrait hangs in place
Blurring behind close bolted doors,
Grown lovelier. But now the face
Was never yours.

THREE MATRICES

SONNET FOR AN EDUCATOR

For jut of jaw and craggy cast of brow
This face deserves a cap of hammered bronze,
Never the mortar-board which marks it now
As master in the fellowship of dons.
There's something plays the devil with my throat
When strength is tempered by its habitat
And, wool replacing leather in a coat,
The warrior becomes the diplomat.

The greatness of your task is undenied;
But I would see you free from little cares,
Damning finance and parley, level-eyed.
I am a fool who fashions foolish prayers:
Oh, buckle on the corselet of a Mars
And I shall follow, follow to the stars.

DREAMER

For Richard

His golden galleons bear him precious things:
The light of dawn; a gay, rebellious star;
Fabric of dreams, and names like Baltasar;
Hair of a princess woven into rings;
A broken hearted bird that never sings,
And memories which time can never mar.
Bearing him eerie cargoes from afar
His galleons come with sails like crimson wings.

Lightly they ride on waves as luminous
As molten silver; and the distant cries
From Cadiz seamen, like an angelus
Of time forgotten, tremble in the skies.
See! As he turns his kindly gaze on us
The golden vessels pass behind his eyes.

A WOMAN'S DEBT TO WOMEN

When Philip's tragedy gave way to pride
He blossomed suddenly with all the sure
And graceful manners of the epicure.
Myopic, flattered matrons opened wide
Their portières and ushered him inside
Where sweet suburban daughters might allure
Prince Charming, so impeccable and pure,
Each wishing to be mother to his bride.

And Philip acted the seducer's part
With delicacy, most of us agreed.
The ones who thought the matter scandalous
Forgot that fragments of a broken heart
Give rise to variations in a need
Which otherwise had been monogamous.

MARBLE AND SONG

Near the Birthplace of Catullus

Here there was grandeur, fallen now to ashes,
To pale gray specters of the living flame.
Gone is the glory born when genius flashes,
Leaving dead contours, and a deathless name.
Ruin, pale desolation fill the fountains.
These bitter cinders were a throat that sped
Music beyond the marching ring of mountains:
Music undying, though the throat is dead.

Builder of timeless lyrics that outlast
Marble of monolith and mausoleum,
What other artisan of ages past
Trusted his fame to this gaunt coliseum?
Only the wind remembers, overhead,
Heavy with phantoms of the futile dead.

CHARON IN THE SUBURBS

Begrudged, the nickels clatter in the box
While tired workers stumble to their seats;
And ample Mrs. Oppenheimer greets
Odell's old clerk who sells her husband sox.
The antiquated trolley jerks and rocks
Along a Styx of dull suburban streets.
A passenger, alighting, sometimes meets
The driver's eye, and wonders if it mocks.

It does; for Charon blows his salary
Quite gallantly on needy girls and drink.
He does not hold that pleasure is a crime.
The passengers are prone to disagree;
But he would laugh at what the people think
Who spend their lives a nickel at a time.

EQUESTRIENNE

Proud as the silver-gray Arabian
That suffers her alone to curb his tongue,
She mocks the easy passions that have wrung
The baited hearts of others of her clan
Who ride because one ought to, if one can.
And when the hunt returns, and bits are hung
For burnishing, and "Peel" is being sung,
She downs her whisky cleanly, like a man.

Her taunting laugh rips out across the hall
Staccato as a crop against a boot.
The gentle girl of not so long ago
Lives only in a painting on the wall
Except at night, when she recalls the suit
Of one as proud, who thought that "No" meant no.

SONNET

There is a vale I know in Hanover
Made misty by the fluttering of bells;
And no-one knows what tiny chorister
Heaves at their tongues; but still, the music swells
Drowsy and sweet on summer afternoons,
While one who hears finds listening too fair
To seek the maker of the eerie tunes,
Fearing that he may vanish into air.

People there are who say the bells are swinging
Within the foolish heads of listeners;
And there are some who swear no bells are ringing
Deep in the vale: that silence never stirs.
But I have heard the music, this I know,
Swelling to greet me, fading when I go.

SONNET

Is it for this that men are born and die:
To pass long hours of a life-long day
In some indifferent and casual way,
Eating or sleeping, and not knowing why;
Watching the laggard seasons amble by
On tired legs, while striving to be gay;
Playing, but never knowing why they play,
Crying, but never knowing why they cry?

For all our dreams, so loftily begun,
Have been foredoomed to live awhile, and pass;
And we must find them futile, every one,
With all the fragile loveliness that was—
False as an ice field gleaming in the sun,
Empty as wind-run corridors of glass.

OF A FEMALE POETASTER
IN HER DOTAGE

Someone lets fall a phrase, once fine, now battered,
Ten thousand times retold. She swoops upon it,
Ready to trick it out a bit, and don it,
Then wind it off for us as if it flattered
Our flayed intelligences, sadly tattered
By platitudes that tumble from her bonnet.
"Remember, fourteen lines to make a sonnet."
As if no other point of structure mattered!

"John Erskine this—," "John Erskine also that—"
Strained through the meshes of her clotted sieve
Phrases once sparkling trickle thin and dead.
Oh send me courage and a baseball bat!
Retold by her, what suffering male would give
A good god damn for what John Erskine said?

SAMARITAN

Crystals of anger set her eyes a-glitter
And took the place of tears, for she was proud.
Wedded virginity, the weirdly bitter,
Hovered about her like a martyr's shroud.
Even to me, for years a confidant,
She made no outcry; but the hurt was plain.
Long hours of loneliness had left her gaunt.
Her body bore the pattern of her pain.

Some men have infidelity inbred;
Such was her husband, netted in the tangle
Of many women's wiles. He made his bed
Ever an old point of each new triangle.
The obvious is difficult for lambs;
And so I spoke of parallelograms.

SONNET

Would you then have me join the little folk
Who spiral down when their loves' hurricane
Hurries too fiercely through the frightened brain?
Would you think better of me if I spoke
In words that any passion may invoke,
And ceased to spell the worth of joy or pain
In syllables that lash like blowing rain?
There were great winds afoot when first I woke.

Others may hasten when the storm clouds hover
Like black armadas sweeping down the sky
And seek their precious safety under cover,
Smugly believing something gained thereby.
There is more bird in me than there is lover.
Great winds will bear me westward when I die.

ANDREWS

He chose by preference a cockle shell
That needed tiller work at every wave
And constant bailing if he were to save
The little that had served him over well.
When March blew yellow weather up from Hell
He played a game of forfeits with a grave
And laughed the loudest when he turned to shave
The ragged reef that held the harbor bell.

While others ran for home with shortened sail,
He loved to meet a wind with teeth, and tack;
And when we sought the secret in his breast,
We caught the distant glimmer of a grail
In eyes that mocked us as he answered back:
"A few men travel East by sailing West."

COLVIN'S SON

It was a point of pride with Colvin *père*
To tell his customers that Colvin *fil*s
Would join in selling soap and paint and grease
After his graduation, and would share
The office; but his wife had had a flair,
Suppressed, of course, for following The Fleece
With dream-born Jasons; and it found release
Now, in the person of the son and heir.

So Colvin filed a solemn caveat
Against the scribbling and the wish to roam.
He wrestled daily on a mental mat
And slew his peace of mind, and wrecked his home
With futile operations to combat
The cool insistence of the chromosome.

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Laing Fool's Errand

